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CIA role grows as probbers dig

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WASHINGTON — CIA station chiefs in Europe and the Mideast provided Lt. Col. Oliver North and other officials with extensive logistical support throughout 18 months of Iranian arms dealings, The Post has learned.

Intelligence sources said CIA station chiefs assigned to U.S. embassies abroad acted on direct orders from headquarters in Langley, Va., to provide back-up for North, retired Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, and former national security adviser Robert McFarlane.

The back-up included safe house facilities when the men secretly visited foreign countries.

The latest revelations raise new questions about CIA chief William Casey's first congressional testimony, in which he claimed his agency had only a nominal role in White House dealings with Iran.

The Post has learned that several investigators now strongly suspect Casey was a key supporter of the entire Iran venture and that the CIA was aware of and perhaps even assisted in the diversion of profits from Iran arms sales to the Nicaraguan contras.

Senate Intelligence Committee chairman David Durenberger plans to recall Casey to testify behind closed doors later this week.

CIA men assigned to embassies under dip-

lomatic cover set up safe house facilities for North, Secord, and McFarlane to meet with Iranian and Israeli middlemen, sources said.

The CIA also provided "back channel" communications links with Washington and translators.

They also directed North and Secord's movements in and out of foreign capitals, so that the White House operatives could slip away without being discovered.

Intelligence experts note that it is entirely possible that agents overseas were not aware of the purpose of North's mission, because they had "no need to know."

Details of the CIA's involvement in the operation were first revealed by Secretary of State George Shultz on Monday, when he said — ~~Ambassador~~ John Kelly, the U.S. envoy to Lebanon, had met with North and Secord and dealt with the National Security Council through a CIA "privacy channel."

Sources said the same private channels and other covert support facilities were set up for North and Secord in Israel, West Germany, Switzerland, Britain, Saudi Arabia and Portugal.

Private communications are usually transmitted in code from electronically protected code rooms located in every U.S.

embassy.

The disclosure about the use of CIA stations to assist North came as administration officials revealed that Casey's personal role in making overtures to Iran date back as far as 1981.

Officials said the central intelligence director constantly spoke at National Security Council meetings — with President Reagan present — about Iran as a "geopolitical prize."

Casey, who had been working with Israel in making overtures to Iran as early as 1981, enlisted the support of McFarlane in persuading Reagan to approve secret diplomacy with Iran in July of 1985.

Casey's involvement in the arms transfers to Iran intensified because of the agency's concern with the kidnapping of its Lebanese station chief, William Buckley, later killed by his Iranian-backed captors.

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